

Edel Quinn



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By

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Cover Art: Edel Quinn in 1923, during her school days at Upton Hall, Cheshire, England, a finishing school for girls.

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INTRODUCTION

I am going to begin at the end for the purpose of putting things in regard to Edel Quinn in their proper setting from the first moment. I take for you the words of the Holy Father spoken in respect of Monsignor Suenens' book on that great little lady. The Holy Father says in a peremptory sort of way that Edel Quinn's life must be made known. Lest you think the Holy Father issues that sort of compliment freely, let me assure you to the contrary. His suggestion to that effect represents something that is unusual.

Also, the Holy Father's great representative, first in Africa and later on in China, Monsignor Riberi, endorses a statement made by Monsignor Suenens in the course of the book. That statement was that, hidden in the depths of the African jungle, Edel Quinn was helping to save China. In his preface to that book, Monsignor Riberi rises even higher, asserting that this girl was destined by sheer force of example to influence the course of history. Elsewhere he says that, but for the inspiration that he derived from her, he could not have found possible the task of launching the Legion of Mary in civil war China. It is to be insisted that those are not words spoken lightly for the sake of being pleasing. The subject is too serious for that. You will realize that in those words lies an extraordinary valuation of a person. Saving China! Influencing the course of history! These are rather big enunciations to make about a person.

Next, I tell you what you already know, namely that her Cause has been recently introduced. It is at an unexpectedly early stage. The long period of waiting that usually occurs after the death of the person has been cut short. While the majority of those who knew her well are still in the land of the living, there is her Cause on the carpet! Perhaps to a big number may be given the privilege of standing before a Tribunal and testifying concerning her. Mostly the testimonies about those whose Cause is being examined proceed from the reading of documents written by people who are long dead, and that is not the most satisfactory way of examining a case.

It is evident that we are in the presence of no common personage. Editions regarding Edel Quinn's life continue to issue from printing presses in many languages. Now, letters are pouring in to us abundantly, letters that tell of favors people think they have received through her intervention. I have read a number of them. They give the impression that there is something at work. It is sufficiently evident in any case that a vast number of people are now thinking in terms of her and, in their various trials and needs, are turning to her and saying to her, "Won't you help me?"

While I am not going to attempt a sketch of her life, still I suppose I had better lay a foundation by giving a recital of the major events of her earlier life.

Edel Quinn was born in 1907 in a part of Ireland that has produced many distinguished people, that is County Cork. The precise place was Kanturk. Her father was a bank official, whose lot it is to be transferred a good deal. As he moved around, he took his little family along with him, eventually settling down in Dublin. Thus, he was in many places. You will remember what is said about Homer the Greek poet: once he was dead, a hundred cities disputed the honor of being his birthplace. Now we find that not a few places are claiming the distinction of having Edel Quinn resident in them for a while.

EDEL JOINS THE LEGION

Her first job was around 1925; it was that of shorthand-typist. It immersed her in the ordinary bustle of the city; work, amusement, religious activity getting their turn. About 1927, a friend brought her into the Legion and she declared that it was a case of love at first sight. It laid its grip upon her heart at once and that grip did not relax but did indeed tighten with each new day. In its system, she found what she needed. Nourished by its Marian doctrine, its practical idealism, and by the grim tasks that fell to her lot, her essential quality began to show itself. Anything committed to her was done well, and quickly it was seen how well. Her fellow-members marked her down as first-rate, and then the higher authorities of the Legion got word of her and began to discuss her.

The presidency of a very difficult branch became vacant. It was the branch that visited the low-down women's lodging houses of Dublin. At that time, these were unspeakable dens and accordingly the work was really exacting. The president, as I say, left, and the members sent word along that an especially excellent person was needed to fill the vacant post. After a little pause, Edel Quinn arrived on the scene to take up office. To say that they were horrified is to put it mildly. As they said in a caucus meeting held immediately after the other meeting (with her absent), "A child has been sent to lead us!" They did not think this adequate. So, they dispatched their Spiritual Director over to headquarters to register their emphatic protest. He came back to them the following week and communicated the result of his mission rather briefly. He said that he had cut no ice.

HER VOCATION

Soon it became evident to them that they had a worthy leader: a leader among leaders. They rejoiced in their good fortune. But not for too long. It was rumored that she had other ideas; that she had always cherished the ambition of becoming a Poor Clare, and that the time was approaching when she was going to realize that aim.

The place in question was Belfast. Her original intention had been to enter the Convent in Donnybrook, that far-famed, even proverbial suburb of Dublin. But the Poor Clares thought that Belfast was more in need of a newcomer. So to Belfast it was settled she should go. All prior arrangements were complete, but on the eve of her departure came a shattering event. It was her physical breakdown. The trouble was tuberculosis, which was more gravely regarded then than now.

She was rushed off to Newcastle Sanatorium in County Wicklow and she spent about a year and a half there. She made an indelible impression at the Newcastle Sanatorium and in County Wicklow. The collection of evidence from people who met her there has been an interesting process. The Matron's judgment concerning her—and here let it be added that the Matron was not a Catholic—was that nobody had ever been in that hospital who was like her. She stood out in ways that were tangible and ways that were not. As an example of the pressure of her personality, note the incident, recounted in Monsignor Suenens' book, of the young nurse on night duty who was faced with the sudden collapse of a patient. Actually, the patient died in Edel's arms. It is a remarkable fact that she did not run to the matron or anyone else. In this moment of panic, she ran to Edel Quinn. She roused Edel up out of bed and asked Edel to help her. An extraordinary fact, if you just analyze it.

The circumstances under which Edel departed from Newcastle Sanatorium are not entirely clear. I have no doubt that the distinguished Roman Official, who is popularly called the Devil's Advocate, will be asking awkward questions there. It is not absolutely certain that she got a clear bill or clear permission. In any case, out she came.

She went back to her home and to her job. After an interval, Edel came back to the Legion. She was so shepherded along that she complained that it was as if they had her sitting up in a coffin. She was not allowed to do the sort of satisfying (by which she meant, enterprising, and trying) work that she wanted.

Then a period ensued in which her extraordinary spirit was kept in a cage, harnessed, and tied down in every way. It lasted until 1936 and it terminated rather dramatically. In that year, efforts were being made to spread the Legion across England. At that time, the English Legionaries had no experience with extension work, whereas the Irish had many who had practiced extension work. So, it was agreed that the many teams put into the field would each consist of an English Legionary and an Irish one.

An appeal went out for volunteers and a large number presented themselves. Among them was her ladyship, Edel Quinn. This was more than a surprise; it was startling. The notion did not recommend itself at all. Her offer was gently refused and she was reminded of the arduous nature of the work in question. Indeed, she had no need to be reminded, for she had done much of it.

EXTENSION WORK IN WALES

However, Edel pleaded to be allowed to go. She pleaded with an insistence that only she could manage. She argued that all were killing her with kindness and preventing her recovery by tying her down too much. Of course, the young woman, as she always did, had her way. It was agreed that she should go. There was one difference. Instead of putting her with an English Legionary, she was partnered with an old friend, Muriel Wailes, who knew every detail about her and would ensure watchfulness and check.

The spiritual scene was one of dire necessity. Religion was languishing, described as half-dead. Hardly a lay person lifted a finger for it. Hardly one who even thought he had any duty in that direction. No one thought of converting the country. The best height aimed for was good conduct. No wonder lapsing was the order of the day.

The two knights-errant had no idle moments. From dawn to dark, they moved through the area, proposing this New Idea. What traveling! How much explaining and repetition! How much apparent beating of the air! Yet, they had plenty of success in the end! Goodwill stirred up and many branches actually started and others seemed certain.

The pair returned overjoyed. A very comforting report was presented. The invalid was radiant and it was evident that the exertions had done her no harm. Not long after her return, she made a second visit to headquarters to voice some afterthoughts. She

considered it essential that there should be someone living in Wales who would carry on the efforts of that fortnight. She had made up her mind to go to Chester, get a post there, and fill that role.

Behold, at this juncture, a notable coincidence! Ruby Dennison, then the Legion Envoy in South Africa, was posting the most urgent appeals for help in her vast area. So the thought came; what about sending Edel Quinn to South Africa? It would be a good assignment from the point of view of her ailment, and it would give her the sense of mission that seemed to be necessary to her. After some consideration, this was proposed to her and it was accepted with an eagerness that was wonderful to witness. Thus, it was arranged that she should go to South Africa.

However, we know the old saying, “The best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley.” That one went astray because Dr. Heffernan, C.S.Sp., then Bishop of Zanzibar and Nairobi, wrote to say that he had heard there was question of Edel Quinn going to Africa. Might he beg that she be sent to his territory, which was so much in need of the Legion? If she were, he would look after every detail. He would guarantee the cooperation of all his missionaries. He would arrange her itinerary.

What a tempting proposition! After all, South Africa had a good envoy while Central Africa had none. The difficulty was already being felt of helping missionaries to start branches through correspondence. How admirably that problem would be solved by her being an envoy there! And what an envoy! She would start a prairie fire there—that is, if she survived. The fact had to be faced that Central Africa was a greater health hazard. Accordingly, there was much weighing and many misgivings, but, in the end, the Officers agreed to recommend that she be sent.

The question of getting sanction from the Concilium, the central governing body of the Legion, came next. That effort provides a whole chapter in Monsignor Suenens’ book. What happened had a peculiar supernatural quality, because, at that time, only the higher officers of the Legion were in favor of the scheme. The Legionaries general body was against it. People would meet you in the street, stop you, and protest indignantly against the story they had heard that this delicate young girl was marked for slaughter. Feeling appeared to be rising and the indications were that, when the proposition came up at Concilium, it would be overwhelmed. Yet, the amazing Concilium session on the subject ended in a contrary course: it unanimously decreed her mission. Though several initially spoke against it, not one person maintained that

course to the point of voting against her going. In those circumstances, one would be tempted to exclaim, "A miracle!" However, on this subject, that word must be sparingly applied.

OFF TO AFRICA

Then arrangements were feverishly hurried. Bishop Heffernan had requested that Edel should travel with a party of his own missionaries who were traveling at the end of October. Rushing to book a berth for her on the boat, it was found that there was not one left. Later on, the Company signified that a single-berth, first-class cabin was available. Normally, envoys cannot receive that amount of consideration, as funds were always restricted. This was different. Edel had to be on that boat, so it was a case of that cabin or nothing. So it was booked. It was destined to play an additional, and providential role. There were a good number of priests on board so a sacristy was needed and an extension of the Mass-saying accommodation. Accordingly, Edel was appointed sacristan. She vacated the cabin early in the morning and it became an Oratory in which many Masses were said daily. But this is looking ahead.

The date of sailing from London was to be 29 October 1936. A party accompanied her thus far. Some days were spent there in making visits and purchases. One episode must be given because it is picturesque. The London Legionaries had written that they wished to make it plain how much their hearts were with her in her great adventure and that they were arranging a farewell function on the evening before her departure. So our party went. When we arrived, the then President of the Legion in England, Mrs. de la Mare, was in a more remote part of the premises and they sent for her. Coming, she was introduced to Edel Quinn, whom she surveyed with a bewildered gaze. Why?

Years before that evening, Mrs. de la Mare had made her first visit to Ireland. One day some Legionaries came to her and said, "We are taking you on a trip through the Garden of Ireland, County Wicklow. Also, we will drop in to see a sick friend of ours who is in the hospital down there." I have not to tell you who the sick friend was. Mrs. de la Mare spent a session with Edel, who made the profoundest sort of impression upon her. Mrs. de la Mare was terribly oppressed by the report that had been given to her of the health of Edel and at the time put Edel into the category of the dying. Still, she was overwhelmed by the vivid personality that was before her and by the incredible

impression of good spirits, life, and even vigor. Though Miss Quinn's name did not remain in her mind, her face remained vivid in Mrs. de la Mare's memory. A bit after her visit to Edel in the hospital, she assigned Edel to the company of the dear departed. Then came the rumors about the envoy to Africa and, now, on the night of the reception, Mrs. de la Mare is face to face with Edel Quinn who, I might inform you, was, that evening, an absolutely ravishing figure. She was wearing a blue silk dress, to which other tongues could do more justice than mine. She certainly looked most beautiful.

"Imagine," said Mrs. de la Mare, when speech came back to her, "my stupefaction to behold that the intrepid adventurer of Africa was the poor invalid of Newcastle! It is like seeing somebody step out of a grave and greet you. "

An eleventh-hour postponement put back the sailing to the 30th. On that sunny morning, the voyage to Africa commenced. The boat was the Llangibby Castle, which only recently made its own last voyage to the ship-breakers.

ENVOY IN AFRICA

Edel's log, or almost daily series of letters, kept her in touch with home during the three-week ocean journey. It exhibited her in a new and lively light, for never before had there been a substantial exchange of letters with her. The picture thereby afforded of her trip—and of herself—is really worth reading through the medium of Monsignor Suenens' book.

Mombasa was reached on the morning of 23 November. By the instructions of Bishop Heffernan, Edel did not remain there but proceeded that very day to Nairobi, a long journey of 350 miles taking 18 hours. There began the toil of envoyship that terminated nearly eight years later with her death in the same place.

One may divide that superb adventure into four parts. The first phase was the one disposed by Bishop Heffernan. The arrangement in the main was that each missionary would be responsible for her in his own area. He would provide her with transport and with audiences. He would help her in all possible ways towards explaining the Legion and setting up branches. When her work was done, he would place her in the care of the next missionary.

That arrangement worked out perfectly for many reasons. It spared the Legion all expense regarding transport. We had the comfort of knowing that somebody was looking after her and preventing excesses. However, it did not please the little lady herself. I need not tell you, this meant the arrangement was going to cease at an early date. Edel said the arrangement imposed an unjustifiable burden upon the missionaries; that it was all very well in these home countries to talk of a missionary putting her into the hands of the next missionary. But when the next was 100 miles away and through the jungle, the thing was not right or fair and she protested against it. She proposed that she be permitted to buy a car. That permission was given and she announced the purchase in the quaint fashion almost of a Royal Proclamation—something to this effect, “Take note that, on this day, the Legion of Mary has become the owner of a Ford coupe, model V8, of the year 1932, at a cost of £40.” Apparently, the car was not as bad as that price suggests. In any case, it looked all right in the photograph that came along.

One condition had however been imposed upon her by us and was going to be insisted upon. It was that she was not to drive that car herself except around a town. In other words, there were to be no long trips where she would drive herself. The reason for this was that she would not be physically able to crank up the car if that were required. Nor would she be able to repair it, so that a breakdown in the heart of the jungle would be unthinkable. Hence, we insisted that she must have a driver. She agreed to that condition and observed it.

Her driver was a man. His name was Ali, but we always called him Ali Baba. He was a native Mohammedan. With that man in the driving seat, she beside him, and a rifle in the back of the car for protection against animals, she covered uncountable thousands of miles. An epic was accomplished exceeding any other that one remembers hearing. That young girl, at the mercy of that driver, plunging out to the end of every track! It was her duty to meet all the missionaries (and they lived in difficult and inaccessible places) and help them start the Legion. However, should you speak to her about the risk of those proceedings, the only satisfaction you would get would be her gentle laughter, perhaps a reference to “heroics,” and the suggestion that mountains were being manufactured out of molehills.

For that modernized knight-errantry, Edel was ideally cast, save for the health factor that had not as yet caused trouble. In that plunging out on those incredible jungle missions, through the swamps and the forests, she had come into her element. Imperturbable,

smiling, happy, and eager for fun and (to use her own words) “leg-pulling”—you could not distress her, you could not disturb her. It was impossible to ruffle the cheerfulness that was her first feature.

However, that light manner was not accompanied by slack performance. Her competence was supreme. Her will was firm and her methods exact. Nothing was left to take care of itself. To her with justice could be applied that Scriptural valuation, “Thou good and faithful servant.”

AFRICAN MUD-BATH

The stories that poured in from the various missionaries and other people who dealt with her are innumerable and impressive. One of the early ones comes to mind. A missionary came to us, as they all did, to tell us about her. He had been hearing for some time of her approach to his own region and, accordingly, he was more or less expecting her. One day at Mass, he turned around from the altar to give Holy Communion and among the faces along the altar rails was a contrasting one. Then, as he put it, he knew that Edel Quinn had come to town. He sent the altar boy to tell her not to go away after Mass but to join him at breakfast, and that was his first encounter with her. She worked out the preliminaries with him then, and she told him that on the following day she had to travel back to her port of previous call where the first meeting of the Praesidium had been arranged.

“That is good,” he said, “because I would like to go with you and see how a first meeting is run. I will look after the question of transport.”

During the night, an African storm raged and, the following day, an ocean of mud lay between the two places.

He said to her after Mass, “You are not making that little journey today as you expected.”

“Oh,” she replied, “I will have to do it. I promised faithfully to be there and I emphasized that nothing at all should keep anybody away. It would be a ludicrous thing if I myself am the chief absentee.”

“They will understand,” he said, “They know the conditions and they will be the first to appreciate your inability to be present.”

In real grief she said, "I would not understand it myself." She added, "I will have to go."

He explained that there was no means of going—no car and no driver could negotiate things, because the road was not visible. His case was convincing but it did not convince her. Finally, he had to yield to her distress. He went off and got a very powerful lorry and a very expert driver. They put chains on the wheels and the three of them set out for the place that was eight miles away. In some incredible fashion, they managed seven miles. At the end of that distance, the lorry got stuck in the mud; the three of them scrambled out and more by swimming than walking they reached their destination in a state that can be imagined. But they reached it.

That was one of the touches that proceeded from her all the time and were so typical of her as to be her veritable trademark. Idealism, which is latent in all, is just ready to be stirred up by such things, so those around Edel put forth their best and tried to meet her half-way.

Another luminous episode was the time they were defrauded regarding petrol. Insufficient petrol was put into the tank with the result that the car stopped in the middle of the jungle. The driver told her they would have to walk back and try to get a drop of petrol somewhere. However, he added, the journey might be a big one, so Edel would not be able to do it. It was agreed accordingly that she would stay behind in the car, and he set out on his journey of discovery. I need not tell you that the thoughts of the average person in that emergency would not be very pleasant. Out there in the heart of the jungle! At any moment there may be a lion pawing savagely at the window to get in! You know the corroding power of anxiety and how strain can upset mental balance so one becomes almost sure the driver will never come back. He was gone for good, leaving me to my fate! Well, when he did come back many hours later with a little petrol, enough to start the car and keep it going for a while, he found her very placidly working away at her correspondence, quite unperturbed by any of the thoughts that might afflict the weaker ones among us.

Another happening, which certainly did not lose in the subsequent telling around the territory, was based on her custom of offering a lift to anyone who might be going her way. Frequently, this invitation would be accepted. On this occasion, a Holy Ghost Brother availed of the lift. He was going on holidays and he said that the rapid run in the car would be a tremendous help to him. But the trip was far from rapid; it stretched

out to two days. We are told that the Brother spent most of those days on his back either repairing mechanical defects in the car or mending punctures. He mended eight punctures. When he got to his destination, he took himself to bed, and the Bishop said he had merited it well. It is not suggested that this behavior was typical of the car, because, in general, it was satisfactory. Archbishop McCarthy, who has introduced Edel's Cause, and who was the representative of the Holy See there, writes rather brightly about the car. Among others of its features, he claims that its rattling was heard at long distances and regarded with pleasure, because Edel always brought spiritual sunshine with her.

It is alleged that there were competitions as to what color the car was, because it varied according to the angle of inspection and according to the degree of light.

THUMBING A RIDE

When she had no car, as was the case before and after the possession of this celebrated vehicle, her ordinary method of getting about, if she was not luckier, was to thumb a lift from a lorry. There were no buses; the ordinary method of traveling would be those lorries. Normally, she would go out on to the road at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning and hold up her hand for an approaching lorry. These lorries would be packed full of African men. They would always stop for her and take her along—perhaps for a hundred miles. She would be deposited in some place where she would set about her business. Sometimes she might be able to come back later in the day, but sometimes she might have to stay for days. Again, the return journey would be under the same conditions, a lift from a lorry. I wonder how many women would face up to these long journeys among those crowds of men. Yet, there never was a case in her whole adventure where she was molested. The people realized that she loved them and that there was not in her one spark of that superiority of the stranger they so much resent. They knew that she was glad to be with them and they loved and respected her as they did nobody else. Her fame traveled through the whole territory and everybody was at her beck and call; everybody was eager to serve her.

THE ISLAND OF SAINT MAURICE

The next phase of her adventure lay in her visit to Mauritius, far out in the Indian Ocean. She had been promised to that island for a long time. Finally, she saw a moment when she could do it, and she went. It was the time of unrestricted submarine warfare in the Indian Ocean when one out of every two ships that sailed was torpedoed. Archbishop Leen watched her intently during her entire time on the island because, in the early moments of her visit, he recognized that she was unusual. He was an expert in the science of the saints. He watched her from that angle and subsequently delivered his considered opinion that she was definitely “canonisable.” He said he could detect no weakness in her. Incidentally, he referred to her apparent freedom from fear that I have mentioned. She did not appear to be subject to its dominion in any shape or form. Nothing seemed to deter or intimidate her.

It is said of her stay in Mauritius that it represented the only place from which she ever departed in tears. Whatever strange quality attached to the affection of the people there, one cannot guess. But such was its effect on her.

The interest of the Archbishop and her efforts were blessed. She left thirty-six excellent Praesidia at work behind her, and the movement was destined to grow ever stronger. She journeyed back through the peril of the ocean, again without mishap, landing in Tanganyika. From that time forward, she had no car. When she set out for Mauritius, she left it at Nairobi and she was never destined to sit in it again.

She was now back on the mainland but in more primitive territory! The climate was harder and there were few convents where she could put up. Though it was not suspected at home, she had been losing ground physically. Her bulletins showed the same steady output of energy and a corresponding yield in branches. Untiringly, unremittingly, interest always at full pitch, she pressed on from place to place. It was like saying a rosary except that each bead was a new locality; each was a contribution towards a clearly seen purpose, towards the functioning of a primary missionary principle—which is, the responsibility of the Africans for evangelizing their own continent. The idea is fundamental. If Africans do not evangelize their own continent, the Church cannot be universally extended or solidly founded.

“MISS QUINN — YOU ARE DYING!”

However, that rosary of places was said at a terrible cost to Edel. Too late and with much sorrow, it was recognized that she was only half-alive. But, on she went, her will outweighing her weakness. Until one day she entered into a conference with a Swiss missionary about the affairs of the Legion in his area. As she talked, he was looking at her in consternation.

Suddenly he interjected, “Miss Quinn, do you not realize that you are dying? Have you made your preparation?”

Such was the incredible position: she was a dying person, yet going around, carrying on her work. His statement was only too true, because she collapsed immediately.

That event took place at Lilongwe in 1941. She was seized with dysentery, malaria, and then pleurisy. She weighed 70 pounds at that time. A wire to us told us that she was dying.

Bishop Julien, the White Father in whose territory she was working, came down to her to pay his final respects. He said Mass for her in an adjoining room and brought her Holy Communion. Then he stood beside her and thanked her for all that she had done for his people. He continued, “Everything that I have been able to do for you I have done. One thing remains to be done. It is to give you a funeral worthy of the great apostle that you are.”

There she was—a broken creature; reduced to the very last; all vitality drained out of her; far away from her kith and kin. One would expect those tender words of the Bishop to open the gates of emotion; that she would treat herself to the little luxury of giving in to tears. But no. He tells how she reacted to his announcement about the grand funeral that she was to get. She burst into uncontrollable laughter! It was so typical of her.

But she did not die. She pulled herself together sufficiently to be flown down to Johannesburg. In the hospital there, they said she might live a month. At the end of the month, they said she might live to the end of the year. At the end of the year, they said they thought she would live on, but she would never be fit to do any more work. All these predictions were successively proved wrong. She was transferred from Johannesburg to the Dominican Sanatorium in Umlamli, Aliwal North, and from there to the Benedictine sanatorium in Nongoma, Zululand. There she staged a restoration.

Ruby Roberts was our envoy in South Africa at this time. She wrote asking that Edel be prohibited from going back to Nairobi as she was saying she was going to do. So off went a wire prohibiting her from moving. The answer to that was a medical certificate saying that she was fit to go and should go; Nairobi would be a better place for her.

BACK ON THE ROAD

She flew back to Nairobi. The journey took three days, and she was air-sick the entire time. She had to be taken out of the plane in an ambulance and brought off to the convent where she was going to stay. She was in bed for twenty-four hours. She got up and resumed her old life at its old tempo. All this occurred in wartime, with its added difficulties! She resumed her work but soon found that she had not her former strength. The prolonged safaris or rounds that she used to make, she found to be beyond her. She gained this knowledge in the hard way. She undertook an extended trip to Kisumu and broke down during it. After that, in discussion with us, she agreed that she would not try any more long journeys, but only short ones in the effort to find what we called her formula of resistance. She promised cooperation and we all thought the formula was gradually being worked out. We believed that there was a slow but steady restoration taking place. But all the time we were in a fool's paradise.

Her center was Nairobi. From it, as on a pivot, her activities radiated. She was staying with the Precious Blood Nuns, a German Order, and their kindness to her was unexampled. They gave her more than care. Her room was a disused sacristy beside the chapel where the Blessed Sacrament resided. This proximity was an honor and a joy to her. During this time some episodes occurred that are strange to read, and difficulties suggest themselves. On one occasion when the Nuns opened up in the morning, they found her lying on the verandah outside, covered with the light coat the day temperature of the place dictated. However, this was in sight of Kilimanjaro, the peaks of which are snow-clad even out there and icy winds proceed from them at night. When the Nuns came out to her, she was shaking all over with cold. She was quite blue and frozen and could hardly stand up. Observing this, they protested most angrily to her, "How could you do this to us? Why did you not ring the bell when you came back last night?"

I must explain that comings and goings out there could not be regulated as in a city. Distances and journeys were big, transport unreliable, and storms were to be expected.

The nuns continued their indignant protest, “If only you had rung the bell, one of us would get up out of bed and let you in.”

She replied, “I could not bring myself to do that. You had your hard day and must get your rest.”

Again they pleaded, “Don’t you do that to us. What is it to get up when we can go back again? You must promise that never will you do the like again.”

Her answer was, “I cannot give you that promise because I know I will do it again if the situation recurs.” And she did it again.

It seems incorrect, and there again the Devil’s Advocate will ask searching questions. The answer is of course that there is no use applying ordinary rules to Edel. The supreme ingredient in her was consideration. She had a “delicate” soul. She could not hurt, she could not disturb, she could not inconvenience anybody. It would be more than her nature would permit that she would ring the bell and wake the nuns up out of bed. In her, we are not dealing with normality. We may as well realize that and allow for certain behaviors in her just as we would accommodate ourselves to a particular climate. The climate of her soul was different. Those occasional moments of “imprudence,” “disobedience,” “recklessness,” and kindred phenomena spring from holy depths in her and should be regarded thoughtfully. They might well be evidence of sanctity rather than arguments against it.

DEATH COMES TO THE ENVOY

In spite of the tender care given to her by everybody, her condition steadily deteriorated. Her steps grew slower, more feeble, and shorter. Her breath became more labored and more rapid. Every day new grey hairs came on to her head. She tells about the time she was taken for one of 60 years of age.

However, her spirit never weakened; in fact, it seemed to assert itself even more; it positively drove her on. She gave the impression that she was filled with a desperate sense of urgency; that she knew now that she had very little time left, and that every second of that time must be used productively. So, she pressed on and on and on in defiance of exhausted nature. Those at home knew nothing of this pathetic struggle. It

would have been unduly optimistic to expect that Edel would communicate on that subject. It is, at the least, a puzzling circumstance that of all the people around her who loved her so dearly, not one thought fit to relay home the facts of her condition.

One Saturday, I came home and found awaiting me one of those photographic airgraph letters of wartime. It was from her. I opened it. I read it with an icy hand upon my heart. She described herself as too exhausted to work. When I read that, I said to myself, “she is telling us that she is dying,” because those words had never been said by her before and never would in normal conditions. While I was reading that message over and over again, there was a ring on the door and a cable was delivered. That cable announced her death. Her brave spirit was no longer contained by its frail habitation. The date of her death was 12 May 1944.

It was my sad mission to bear the news of her death to her parents. They lived in Monkstown, Dublin. When her mother saw me, she burst out into loud sorrow and hurried to her bedroom to weep her heart out, although no one had yet told her, nor do I feel that my appearance told the tale. She knew at first glance.

There was an absolute wave of sorrow in Africa. Everyone seemed to feel her death as a personal loss. In that warm climate, they hurry a funeral. In her case, they delayed it for twenty-four hours, to give the missionaries and the people over a wide area the opportunity to come in to Nairobi to be present. A wonderful ceremonial attended her at the Missionaries’ Cemetery, where now she rests. If you want to read something effective, you should study those chapters of Monsignor Suenens’ book that deal with her passing away and with that funeral. They represent some of the most beautiful descriptive writing I have ever known. Do not deny yourself that elevating experience.

Edel was a legend even in her lifetime and that legend has gone on increasing. Now, another stage has been entered by the introducing of her Cause.

THE MYSTERY OF EDEL

It is extraordinary that one so essentially simple and single-minded, moved by such direct motives, should at the same time present us with a mystery. Yet that is the position. It is impossible to solve her. She was a completely intangible character. She maintained an impenetrable reserve regarding her interior, and digging up material in

that department presented an immense difficulty to the author of her Life. He had to go to infinite trouble by way of approaching all the priests and nuns who knew her in order to delve beneath the surface of her life.

I mentioned what Archbishop Leen said about her freedom from fear, but the same could be said regarding the other natural repugnances. What did she like? What did she dislike? Nobody could ever make out. You could not imagine her being held back by anything from what she conceived to be her duty; nor could you think of her as displaying weakness in any position. Mention has been made of the possibility of a lion trying to get into the car in that period of waiting in the jungle. How would she react to that? I think I know perfectly well. Her reaction would be like that of Saint Francis of Assisi.

She would welcome that lion and say to him, "Have you come to take me away to the Lord, Brother?"

Was she grim or insensitive like many hard men who have no sense of fear, but who have no other sort of feeling in them either? Do not think that about her, because it would be the opposite of the case. She was ultra-sensitive. She had a highly developed sensitive quality and her nature must have thrilled to every one of the natural signals. She loved her family intensely, especially her mother, but she never intended to go back to them again. She loved all of her friends tremendously, but she walked away from them. I think everybody was in tears when the Llangibby Castle moved out from Tilbury Docks, except the young lady herself.

What is the explanation of the mystery? The best explanation I am able to give is this one: to an extent that is very seldom met, spiritual motives were in possession of the center of her being. I might put it more simply and say that the Lord and His Mother were living there in a way that they are not in most of us. Everything that presented itself through her senses was referred to "Them." If things were not right, they just, so to speak, rebounded; they did not penetrate to cause harm or even hesitation. If things were right, in they rushed and lit a flame.

There were two effects in all that. One was that the ordinary weaknesses and temptations that afflict us and toss us about like hay, did not affect her. It was as if her defenses kept the enemy out, whereas with us the enemy gets in and is only dislodged after a struggle. Then, on the other hand, things that were regarded as for good came in

and lit that fire in her and carried her away. That is the explanation of those examples of “incorrectness” that many people think they find in her. She is lying in bed in a state bordering on complete collapse and under strict orders not to get up. She hears that a bishop has come into the territory 100 miles away, somebody that she had been waiting and wishing to see for a long time, because much depended on it. She gets out of bed, dresses, crushes down nature, sets off on that trip, accomplishes her mission, and comes back to bed!

Wrong! Absolutely wrong! You cannot apply the common rules. The transaction ran away with her and that is all! However, it had to be something essentially good to be able to do that with her.

Everyday faults were not to be seen in Edel and there could be no question of sin. If ever devotion were on tap, it was in her case. If ever there were courage, and if ever endurance were shown in a Cause, she showed it. At least in the first part of her expedition she exceeded the physical output of strong men, even of the Africans, which is an admitted fact. Would you know all that from being with her? No. She avoided doing anything that would bring attention on her. All around are girls who would behave much as she did. A prominent aspect was her tendency towards humor and good spirits. She was great fun in company. She laughed her way through everything.

As a nun, who was protesting to her about something, once said indignantly, “Don’t start your laughing at me now, Miss Quinn. Just answer me these questions.”

She had an intense sense of humor and occasionally this caused her to be misunderstood. She dropped in one time on a friend. Finding her lunching on baked beans, Edel smilingly remarked, “You are treating yourself to great luxury.”

Her friend took that seriously and afterwards quoted it as an example of Edel Quinn’s austerity: that she considered baked beans a tremendous luxury for lunch. In her outward behavior, Edel was the most natural of people. She would eat what was put before her, within certain limits. The things that could be acts of self-denial were so guarded from public attention that only a close observer would be led to comment on them. In which case, she would insist that it was a matter of liking and not of deprivation. Again, I say, it was impossible to diagnose her.

She did not talk much. In a group, it was not Edel’s voice that was heard. When this is pointed out to those who knew her well, they are at first incredulous, so much did she

make her presence felt in any company. She was not conspicuously silent. She seemed to play her part in a conversation while, at the same time, it was others who were doing the major part of the talking. There was very definitely an atmosphere of grace and peace about her that softened people. The note of any group where she was would be that of good humor and harmony.

HER LOVE OF FUN

At the risk of startling some, I must quote one incident concerning her that drastically shows that outstanding holiness is no bird of a feather with melancholy, but can in fact descend into unrestrained mischievousness. Mention has been made of the last-minute postponement of the sailing of the “Llangibby Castle.” Because they had business in Dublin, two of the party who had come to London could not wait over. So this resulted in Edel seeing them off instead of their seeing her off. This set her and the other girls plotting and scheming. When we reached Euston Station, we found that the compartment in which the pair (a lady and gentleman) were booked to travel, was decorated with wedding favors on a scale that would never be seen in the case of a genuine wedding. The train was crowded so alternative accommodation was not available and the victims had to submit to the outrage. The lady pretended to enjoy the situation. Perhaps she did! But the gentleman was unutterably embarrassed. He sought to cloak this by vowing his indifference regarding his own plight and vehemently protested his sympathy for his companion. Then the whistle went. All the girls produced packets of confetti and simply deluged the pair. Imagine for yourself that journey to Holyhead.

While those who were left behind were laughing over the business, the porters arrived on the scene with brushes, none too pleased with the task of sweeping up, and voicing their feelings. They explained that usually they had one wedding party but this night they had three, one at each end of the train, and one in the middle. Ours was the one in the middle! And the porters said it was the noisiest!

That leaning towards fun was typical of Edel. It was somewhat suppressed by certain types of company or by hard work, but it was always in her and must be kept in mind if a true perspective is to be gained of her.

There is also a tale of the cow that a convent had asked her to bring to the next village. The cow was none too willing to go, with the result that the whole population had to be mobilized to chase it. It was finally captured, tied to a plank, put in the back of the van, and delivered to its destination. There Edel got into her discussion with the missionary about starting the Legion. When he learned all that this entailed, he cried out in mock dismay, “Why had that cow got to come to this place?” Those who knew Edel will have no trouble picturing her face all alight with its typical expression of humor, as she explained, “It was not the cow brought me, Father. It was I who brought the cow.”

TESTIMONY TO HER HOLINESS

Now to turn from happy to grave, from lively to severe. I had the pleasure of listening in to the questioning of her family by Bishop Suenens. It was a stirring experience. At an early point, he asked what was her dominant characteristic as a young child. Without taking even a moment to reflect, her mother answered, “Her unselfishness.”

At once the others chimed in with their comment, “Yes, Edel was completely unselfish.”

Then the question came, “At what age did that develop in her?”

Her mother said, “It was always in her from the time she was a baby.”

Which produced from us the objection, “But that could not be. Babies are at best selfish little animals and they have to learn the better things from the grown-up people!”

“No, No, No!”—almost indignantly: they had never seen a sign of selfishness in her. And that incredible assertion was adhered to.

That testimony is found recurring in the documents that are before us. The phrase “the most unselfish person I ever met” is often repeated. The Carmelites and other orders in Africa speak of her visits to them as being “angel visits,” leaving an overwhelming impression. This means that eminently holy people regarded it as a spiritual favor to come in contact with her—an astounding valuation to make of anyone! Everybody who had such a visit from her talks about it.

She had no enemies. She had no critics, which is an amazing thing, because she had to be unyielding. She had to set up the authentic Legion of Mary, not a watered-down product, and she was going to do it. In her unutterably sweet, gentle fashion, she was inflexible where she had to be firm.

But perhaps it goes too far to say she had no critics. A note of criticism has been lightly sounded saying she should have been in a sanatorium instead of wandering widely and possibly conveying infection! Apply to this the fact, already voiced, that consideration was her first characteristic. Somewhere in her mind, she squared all these things, one with another, and found justification for her action. It is profoundly significant that no case of infection has ever been alleged against her, although it might be expected that she would be blamed for everything of the sort that would occur along her line of march.

Before she went to Africa, she was a great beauty. It is a pity, a sort of tragedy, that her true likeness has not been recorded. The photograph that appears on the cover of her Life is so inadequate as to be almost a travesty. For one thing, nobody ever saw her so grave looking as that picture represents her. Perhaps it would be too much to say that she was always smiling, but there was always the suggestion of a smile, a brightness, a radiation of benevolence. Looking out through her lovely features, and animating them, was a spiritual quality that could not be captured by a camera or anything else because it was the projection of her soul itself.

Her charm of manner was supreme, but it went far deeper than the surface. There was nothing artificial in her. She attracted people very strongly. In trying to analyze this fact, one is reminded of the suggestion Chesterton makes about Saint Francis of Assisi—the secret of the saint's power lay in peoples' conviction that he was interested in each one of them. I would say that anyone who spoke with Edel Quinn ended up with that same idea. As a consequence, they loved her and wanted to do what she asked of them. Originally, she must have been physically strong, because she came from a family that was strong. One sister was a champion swimmer, third in Ireland in the national championship, and a member of the Irish team against England. Another sister was in the same category, almost as good. Another sister played provincial hockey for Leinster.

Now a final word. There is no use reading this little account of Edel Quinn and leaving matters so. What is here contained is but the merest sketch, the standard Life by Monsignor Suenens must be read. It is a memorable document, worthy of its subject.

You will rise up from the reading of it with thoughts that will not fade. It will give you a new aspect on holiness. It will make it evident that great holiness is not inhuman, unattainable, or unattractive. There is nobody, whosoever it be, who will not derive benefit from reading about her.

Most biographies color their subjects a little. Possibly this is inevitable. Readers want to be enlightened, not burdened by a recital of weaknesses. Lest one might expect to find that process at work in the story of Edel Quinn, it is important to state that there is not a word of exaggeration in it. One Bishop from the territory has made representations to the opposite effect; i.e., that Edel is insufficiently portrayed!

Everyone owes it to his own soul to read the book and seek to learn the lesson it affords. How, out of her physical wreckage and her short life, Edel Quinn fashioned an achievement that can rank with any of the epics of the past, but an achievement that is bigger than common history because it helped build the Catholic Church.

Justly of her could Homer's words be sung, "Short is my tale, but deathless my renown."

Nihil Obstat:

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NOTE: In Obedience to the Decrees of Pope Urban VIII, the author declares that all that is written in this booklet has no other authority or credit than such as is grounded on human evidence. Hence, no expression or statement is intended to assume or forestall the decision of the Church.



Edel, aged 4, in 1911

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